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ABSTRACT

The Hispanic literature of the American southwest contains valuable materials for the Spanish elementary classroom, leading to positive cultural analysis and enlightening the learners about cultural and historical events of the second language community. The story entitled "El camello que se perdio" ("The Camel Who Got Lost") is suitable for fourth and fifth graders with some language training. It provides an opportunity to introduce cultural and historical background information, discuss the various purposes of such a story, and teach a small set of lexical and grammatical items in an interesting context. Several potential class games include a "what is it?" vocabulary review, "yes or no" and "true or false" alternative choice games based on story facts, a verb review game of charades, and a picture guessing game. (MSE)

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"El camello que se perdió" in the Second Language Elementary Classroom

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The terms foreign language and second language are usually employed interchangeably, although there are significant differences between the two concepts. A foreign language implies that the learner has to travel to far away lands in order to use the language in a truly realistic framework, or that the learner can use it as a means of communication with foreigners. On the other hand, a second language has definite "communicative functions inside"[1] the learners country and even in his own community. In this context, Spanish is a second language in the United States where many communities have a Hispanic population and the students are able to use the language learned in the classroom to communicate with over twenty million American citizens.

Among the "non-linguistic factors which many people believe (from observation and/or statistical evidence) to influence success in second language learning," one can point out two of great importance to all learners, especially children. These two factors are motivation for learning and opportunity for learning.[2] Both of these aspects can be greatly enhanced in the classroom by the teacher and the materials that he or she selects to work with the students. Motivation can be successfully strengthened in children by selecting interesting, attractive, appealing materials which contain intrinsic cultural and aesthetic values, and which are appropriate to their grade level. The teacher and the materials selected can also promote motivation for learning the second language by creating in the classroom a healthy attitude toward the second language community. Hence one can see the importance of selecting materials that lead to a positive cultural analysis and enlighten the learners about cultural and historical events involving the second language community.

The Hispanic literature of the American southwest constitutes a precious source of

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valuable materials for the Spanish elementary classroom. It contains numerous tales, myths, legends and fables in which a child's dream world and day to day reality are skillfully combined as in all great works of children's literature. One charming tale which belongs to this body of literature is "El camello que se perdió" ("The Lost Camel") which is included in José Griego y Maestas' and Rudolfo A. Anaya's Cuentos: Tales from the Hispanic Southwest,[3] a bilingual collection of short stories which contains a wide range of tales appropriate for different age groups.

"El camello que se perdió" narrates the story of some merchants who were traveling to another country to sell their products. When it became dark and they were ready to make camp, they realized that there was a camel missing. They met a man and asked him if he had seen it. He answered that he had not seen it but that he could offer them information on the missing camel. He told them that the camel was carrying a load of wheat on its left side, and on the right side it was carrying jars of honey. In addition, the man told them that the camel was blind in one eye and that it had a tooth missing.

The merchants were extremely surprised and somewhat suspicious and demanded to know how the man knew so much about their camel. The man patiently answered:

> "I know he was carrying wheat on his left side because grains had fallen along the left side of the path. The bag was probably cut by some branches. Ants were gathering the grains on the left side of the trail. I know he was carrying jars of honey because on the right side of the path flies were swarming where the honey had dripped." (p. 85)

The merchants continued to question him:

> "Fine, but how do you know he is blind in one eye?"
> "Because I noticed he had been grazing only on the right side of the path," the man answered.
> "And how do you know he has a tooth missing?"
> "Because where he had chewed the grass he left a clump in the middle of the bite." (p. 85)

Upon explaining how he had come to these conclusions, the man indicated to the merchants where to look for the camel. The merchants found the camel and handsomely

rewarded this honest man who had such refined powers of observation.

This story is very suitable material for fourth or fifth grade students of Spanish as a second language, provided they have had previous training in the language. At these levels the learners' listening skills are usually developed enough to appreciate and enjoy it. The story easily lends itself to provide some enlightening background on the Hispanic presence throughout the American southwest. An historical introduction relating when and how the Spanish first came to the United States and what legends and traditions they brought with them could lead to a most interesting cultural analysis. The teacher can even expand and include information about the Moors in Spain and the Spanish knowledge of the marvelous tales of A Thousand and One Nights. Some of these tales came to the American southwest with the Spanish, blended with indigenous tales and traditions, and still remain today as part of the rich folklore of the Hispanic people of the United States.

In addition, the students can be informed that in the old Southwest, stories like "El camello que se perdió" had several purposes. They taught Hispanic children about animals around the world but above all they demonstrated to children the value of being always aware of their own environment. Many Hispanic children were sheepherders and had to be alert about their animals' behavior and had to detect special markings on their animals. Also, early recognition of wild animals' tracks or the presence of hostile Indians in the area proved to be critical factors for the survival of these youngsters in the hills.

These kinds of valuable background can be provided in either English or Spanish depending upon the linguistic development of the students.

"El camello que se perdió" is a true short story in the literal sense of the word, for the Spanish version is no longer than one page. It is narrated almost in its entirety in concrete terms. In fact, with a knowledge of the twenty-five nouns[4] that constitute the heart of the story, the children can enjoy and celebrate their comprehension of the story

in Spanish. Children are more successful in second language learning when exposed to simple, concrete speech with which they can relate to the here-and-now.[5] The great number of concrete terms makes this story very suitable to be narrated using visual stimuli without resorting to the use of English. Pictures, mounted on construction paper, can be prepared depicting the camel, the merchants, the man, the countryside, the flies swarming, the ants carrying grains of wheat, the grass, and all the other nouns that make up the story.

Other important lexical items in the story are verbs; thus actions and mime are essential elements which can accompany the visual stimuli. The merchants who "viajaban a otro país a vender sus productos" (were traveling to another country to sell their products) can be acted out by the teacher while holding the appropriate illustration. Although the story makes use of a wide range of verb tenses and is an excellent example of the use of the preterite and imperfect tenses, it can be dramatically narrated to children using mainly the present tense.

The adjectives and past participles used as adjectives are not more than thirteen in number, and they also can be dramatized and illustrated without having to use English. The use of "derecho" (right) and "izquierdo" (left) provide an excellent opportunity to practice directions and positions in Spanish with young learners. These terms can be used later in a follow-up activity combined with the presentation or review of the parts of the body: "el ojo derecho" (the right eye), "el ojo izquierdo" (the left eye), "la mano derecha" (the right hand), "la mano izquierda" (the left hand).

After the students have had a rewarding listening experience with "El camello que se perdió", play activities graded in difficulty can be carried out to elicit speech in the form of Spanish words and sentences. The teacher must be sure that the young learners will experience success and self-satisfaction in these activities. Therefore, it is recommended that the initial exercises be group activities.

A very useful game to provide vocabulary review is "¿Qué es esto?" Definite and

indefinite articles both in their singular and plural forms are requisite knowledge for this activity. Consequently, a review of these items before playing the game is a worthwhile endeavor in order to avoid errors in gender. In this game the teacher holds the pictures mounted on construction paper one at a time and asks the students: "¿Qué es esto?" (What is this?). Choral responses of the students are: "Es un hombre" (It is a man), "Es el campo" (It is the countryside), "Es una hormiguita" (It is a little ant). The game can continue until all the nouns of the story are reviewed or until interest in the activity begins to wear off.

A "SI o no" game, in which the students are provided with two alternatives from which they select one, can follow. In this activity the children repeat together the correct alternative while reviewing the sequence of events in the story. They are presented with questions such as: "¿Los mercaderes perdieron un camello o no perdieron un camello?" (Did the merchants lose a camel or did they not lose a camel?); "¿Los mercaderes encontraron un hombre o no encontraron un hombre?" (Did the merchants meet a man or did they not meet a man?); "¿El hombre les dijo que había visto el camello o que no había visto el camello?" (Did the man tell them that he had seen the camel or that he had not seen the camel?); "¿Llevaba carga el camello o no llevaba carga?" (Was the camel carrying a load or not carrying a load?); "¿El camello es tuerto o no es tuerto?" (Is the camel blind in one eye or is it not blind in one eye?). It is important to note that if the teacher has chosen to narrate the story in the present tense, all these questions must be posed in the present tense. In addition, the use of visuals is very valuable in this activity.

A game of "Verdad o mentira" can be played with the teacher making a series of statements and the students answering, "Es verdad" (It is true) or "Es mentira" (It is not true). If the teacher says, "Las hormiguitas estaban recogiendo los granos de trigo" (The little ants were gathering the grains of wheat), the students react by saying, "Es verdad", but if the teacher says, "Al camello no le falta un diente" (The camel is not

missing a tooth), the students respond, "Es mentira."

The verbs learned in the story can be reviewed with "Un juego de acertijos" (Charades) in which the teacher acts out actions like "agarrar" (to grasp), "buscar" (to look for), "caminar" (to walk), "derramar" (to spill), "indicar" (to indicate), "recoger" (to gather), "robar" (to steal), "tirar" (to throw), and many other verbs in the story which can be demonstrated through mime.

After carrying out several whole group activities, the students will be ready to perform in small groups and individually. A small group activity that children will enjoy is the game "¿Qué tengo?" (What do I have?). The class is divided in groups of four or five children and the teacher distributes the visuals to the students requesting that they do not reveal the picture they have. The children take turns asking "¿Qué tengo?" and select members of their group to guess what picture they have. The students selected ask questions like the following: "¿Tienes el hombre?" (Do you have the man?); "¿Tienes el camello?" (Do you have the camel?); "¿Tienes la carga?" (Do you have the load?); "¿Tienes la hormiguita?" (Do you have the little ant?). The groups can later exchange pictures and continue the game as long as the interest lasts.

These activities are extremely important because they offer the students the opportunity to actively participate in the review of the story, and this is the time when the learners are verbally utilizing the newly acquired vocabulary. The activities can be distributed over several class periods and the teacher can use them according to his or her discretion.

A short story like "El camello que se perdió" is worthwhile material in the elementary Spanish classroom. It offers the opportunity to learn by providing a very entertaining listening activity which can be successfully accompanied by non-linguistic resources such as mime, gestures, and visual stimuli. In effect, listening is a critical element for language acquisition in young children as well as in adults. A great deal of listening must take place in order to stimulate speech production, and "listening

comprehension may map the blueprint for speaking."[6]

"El camello que se perdió" provides the opportunity to develop awareness of a large minority group in the United States. Through its use in the classroom, the teacher can project a positive image of the Hispanic community, furthering the motivation of the young learners who may want to continue learning and enjoying Spanish in the classroom.

Notes

1. William Littlewood. Foreign and Second Language Learning. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 54.

2. William Littlewood, p. 53.

3. (Santa Fe: The Museum of New Mexico Press, 1980.), pp. 82-85.

4. See appendix for vocabulary.

5. Littlewood, p. 60.

6. David E. Wolfe and Gwendolyn Jones." Integrating Total Physical Response Strategy in a Level I Spanish Class," Foreign Language Annals, v. 15, N. 4 (Sept. 1982), p. 273.

Appendix
"El camello que se perdió"
Vocabulary

Nouns

albricias, reward given to one bringing good news
el bocado, mouthful
el camello, camel
el camino, road, path
el campo, countryside
la carga, load
el día, day
el diente, tooth
la dirección, direction, way
el grano, grain
la gratificación, reward
el hombre, man
la hormiguita, little ant
el mechoncito, little tuft of grass
el medio, middle
el mercader, merchant
la miel, honey
el motón, heap
la mosca, fly
el país, country
el palo, stick, branch
el producto, product
la razón, reason, explanation
el trigo, wheat
la vereda, path
el zacate, grass

Adjectives - Past Participles Used as Adjectives

agujereado, pierced, perforated
bueno, buen, good
cierta, certain
escondido, hidden
derecho, right
hecho, made
izquierdo, left
mismo, same
obscuro, dark
opuesto, opposite
otro, another
tuerto, blind in one eye

Other

ya, already

Verbs

agarrar, to grasp
buscar, to look for
caminar, to walk
dar, to give
decir, to say
dejar, to leave (behind)
derramar, to spill
encontrar, to find
estar, to be
faltar, to lack
hacer, to do
indicar, to indicate
ir, to go
llevar, to carry
perder, to lose
poder, to be able
preguntar, to ask a question
recoger, to gather
robar, to steal
saber, to know
salir, to leave, go out
ser, to be
querer, to want
tener, to have
tirar, to throw
tomar, to take
vender, to sell
ver, to see
viajar, to travel